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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related
forms of intolerance, follow-up to and implementation
of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

Written statement* submitted by Servas International, a non- governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Shaping Peace Together

The International Day of Peace 2020 is held under the motto “Shaping Peace Together.” Aimed at spreading compassion, kindness and hope in the face of the Covid 19 pandemic, people around the world are called to “stand together against attempts to use the virus to promote discrimination or hatred.”

The Corona crisis has exposed areas where societies are at risk of being broken. During a webinar on April 23, 2020 by the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS), Razan Zuayter, President of the Arab Network for Food Sovereignty, referred to the crisis as “corona's volcano,” that revealed the deterioration and the absence of values in many countries. She warned that certain policies had prioritized the welfare of the economy over human lives, neglecting the elderly and their right to access health care. In the same context she also warned that the coronavirus crisis had exposed major imbalances, especially with regards to labor rights.¹

Indeed, the Corona crisis does (again) disproportionately affect already vulnerable communities. In an article² in The Guardian, Alana Lentin, Associate Professor at Western Sydney University, wrote: “While biologically the virus may not discriminate, it is having a much worse effect on people from ethnic minorities.” Quoting Omar Khan, she stretched that due to existing social determinants of health such as overcrowding and poor living conditions, the virus is hitting people marginalized by societies harder than others. Minority communities, she said, are further disproportionately targeted by policing, including higher fines for breaching social distancing directives against migrants and indigenous people.

Europe was not exempt from the increase of racism. In France, Asians complained about abuse on public transport and social media. Using the hashtag JeNeSuisPasUnVirus (I'm not a virus), there was an outcry when local newspaper Le Courier Picard used the headline "Alerte jaune" (Yellow alert) and "Le péril jaune?" (Yellow peril?), showing the image of a Chinese woman wearing a protective mask. BBC³ reported that a 17-year-old Parisian of Vietnamese and Cambodian origin, had faced humiliating comments on a bus in the city from both young and old. "There's a Chinese woman, she is going to contaminate us, she needs to go home". People looked at her "in a disgusted way, as if [she] was the virus.”

The reason why the Corona crisis has again exposed racism and xenophobia was explained by Marshall Shepherd in Forbes.⁴ He pointed out that “people exhibit a certain degree of tribalism in life. We see it in politics, sports, conspiracy theories, and more [...] people tend to fear things that they don't understand. [...] Therefore, it is not surprising that racist or xenophobic views would arise from fear and self-preservation tendencies, even if flawed.” A study⁵ under the title “What fuels prejudice” published in 2019 by the Harvard Gazette found that “if you're a white or black person living in a region with more infectious diseases, you have a strong feeling in favor of your in-group and a stronger opposition to the out-group.”

In sum it must be held, that the Corona crisis does not only increase already existing forms of racism and xenophobia, it also disproportionately affects the most vulnerable and increases the already existing gap between cultures. As an organization committed to peace through intercultural communication, SERVAS International is concerned by all forms of xenophobia and racism. Especially during this crisis, we must speak out for human rights and dignity of all peoples and we need to warn about the effect this crisis will have especially on those who have already been disproportionately disadvantaged.

To put things in perspective, the international community should also remember the large number of people dying from hunger, various diseases, or conflicts around the world.

¹ <https://apnature.org/en/media/news/zuayter-coronavirus-crisis-has-revealed-moral-deterioration-western-capitalism>.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/12/coronavirus-racism-bame-pandemic-race>.

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51294305>.

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marshallshepherd/2020/02/28/the-science-of-why-coronavirus-exposes-racism-and-xenophobia/#26d5deff3695>.

⁵ <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/08/harvard-study-suggests-racial-tension-may-stem-from-fear-of-exposure-to-infectious-diseases/>.

Worldwide, 821 million people do not have enough food and every year approximately 3.1 million children die from hunger. COVID-19 is deepening the hunger crisis and creates new epicenters of hunger across the globe. According to OXFAM⁶, by the end of the year, 12,000 people per day could die from hunger linked to COVID-19 – potentially more than will die from the disease itself:

“The pandemic is the final straw for millions of people already struggling with the impacts of conflict, climate change, inequality and a broken food system that has impoverished millions of food producers and workers. Meanwhile, those at the top are continuing to make a profit: eight of the biggest food and drink companies paid out over \$18 billion to shareholders since January even as the pandemic was spreading across the globe - ten times more than has been requested in the UN COVID-19 appeal to stop people going hungry.”

Estimates of how much money it would take to end world hunger range from \$7 billion to \$265 billion per year.⁷ At the same time, in 2019, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute⁸, global military expenses were almost \$1.7 trillion, 3.6% higher than 2018. The International community therefore must work on a better reallocation of resources from war to peace; for urgent attention to global warming and guarantee of universal health care.

In the first days of the pandemic, António Guterres, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, emphasized that “people and their rights must be front and centre”, and that human rights “can and must guide COVID-19 response and recovery”. Global cooperation and solidarity are urgently needed to resolve critical issues of health, poverty, hunger, homelessness. Already in 2012 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet wrote⁹: “The values of the international community were not only ends in themselves but also means to achieve genuine and stable international peace and security.”

Instead of allowing for the gap between societies to deepen, international solidarity is the only way to overcome the crisis. It also must be the foundation of the medical response to Covid 19. As phase 3 of the clinical trial of investigational vaccine for COVID 19 begins¹⁰, people living in wealthier countries will presumably be the first beneficiaries. On August 7, 2020 the Swiss government announced that “In order to guarantee Switzerland early access to the vaccine, the federal government has concluded an agreement for the procurement of 4.5 million vaccine doses.”¹¹ Even though Switzerland also underlined its support of multilateral projects for the fair distribution of a future vaccine, it must be feared that those people living in less wealthy countries will once again be among the last in the line.

Article 1 of the UN Charter¹² provides that one of the purposes of the United Nations is “to achieve international co-operation [...] in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion”

Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination provides: “States Parties condemn racial discrimination and undertake to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and promoting understanding among all races.”

Article 4 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides that during war, public danger and other emergencies [...] a State party is nonetheless not permitted to take measures inconsistent with its other obligations under international law and involving “discrimination on the ground of race, color, sex, language, religion or social origin.”

The International community must:

⁶ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/hunger-virus-how-covid-19-fuelling-hunger-hungry-world>.

⁷ <https://www.globalgiving.org/learn/how-much-would-it-cost-to-end-world-hunger/>.

⁸ <https://www.sipri.org>.

⁹ In: Eyewitness to Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda.

¹⁰ <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/phase-3-clinical-trial-investigational-vaccine-covid-19-begins>.

¹¹ <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/home/das-bag/aktuell/medienmitteilungen.msg-id-80005.html>.

¹² https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v2_rul_rule88.

- Ensure that measures undertaken by advanced economies include the Covid 19 threats to the developing world
 - Take urgent action to end global inequalities including the hunger crisis and build fairer, more robust, and sustainable support systems and to this end
 - Establish an international solidarity fund that other countries and private sector could join
 - Ensure a better reallocation of resources from war to peace, for urgent attention to global warming and guarantee of universal health care
 - Make the fight against racism and xenophobia a priority, including the Durban Declaration and its Program of Action.
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